



Group Decision Making Styles

All groups make or influence decisions. Some decisions are big and impact the entire partnership (e.g., how funds should be allocated to achieve the partnership mission). Some are small and have only minimal impact on members (e.g., where the next meeting should be held). The four decisionmaking styles described below are for you to consider as you go about developing communication strategies that are responsive to the needs of the people and organizations that are part of your early childhood development systems building efforts.¹ Effective communication includes helping group participants (staff or stakeholders) understand their roles in the various decisionmaking models which can reduce conflict and focus discussion.

Autocratic – “Leader Decides”

Autocratic decision making involves the leader maintaining control of and responsibility for the decision. As the collaborative leader you make and announce the decision without consulting the group.

Advantages: Autocratic decisionmaking is fast. As the leader you do not ask for suggestions or ideas from the group. You base your decision on personal knowledge and perceptions of the situation. Decisions are made with little or no discussion.

Disadvantages: Group members are less likely to support and participate in the collaborative effort when they have no input in the decisionmaking process. Continued and regular autocratic decision making can lead to distrust, low morale, and inefficiency, especially if group members are adversely affected by the decision.

When to Use This Style: Use autocratic decisionmaking when the decision needs to be made quickly or when outcomes involve inconsequential matters that will have little impact.

Consultative – “Leader Decides With Input from the Group”

Consultative decisionmaking is when the leader involves the members of the group by asking them to share ideas, perceptions, and information concerning the decision. As the leader you maintain control and responsibility for the decision but let the group know how their input impacted the final decision.

Advantages: Group participation and involvement in the decisionmaking process can lead to increased levels of commitment to the collaborative work. Input from others increases understanding about the situation and helps the leader make a better decision.

Disadvantages: Group members may assume they have a say in the final decision, which is not the case. It must be clear to the group that their recommendations will be considered, but the leader is still making the final decision.

¹ Jago, A.G. & Vroom, V.H. (1988). *The New Leadership: Managing Participation in Organizations*. Upper Saddle River: Pearson.

When to Use This Style: Use consultative decisionmaking when you don't have time to negotiate consensus but you need the expertise of the group to make a quality decision.

Democratic – “One Member, One Vote”

The leader gives up ultimate decisionmaking authority and has an equal vote in the democratic decisionmaking process where the majority wins. While the group votes and the majority leads, no one individual is responsible for the decision and the group may not feel responsible if all of the members did not vote. There may be no responsibility taken for the decision.

Advantages: Provides an opportunity for all group members to have equal input in decisions that can be made fairly quickly and with minimal impact.

Disadvantages: Group members may agree to comply with the voting decision, but they may not take ownership or feel responsible for the decision if their vote did not win.

When to Use This Style: Democratic decisionmaking can be used to narrow down the field of alternatives for consideration, and when you need to speed up decision results. Use it when it is important to know the general opinion of the group, but you do not anticipate major resistance from those who “lose” the vote.

Consensus – “The Group Decides”

Consensus decisionmaking means that every group member buys into the decision. The leader gives up total control of the decision to the group. Group members are fully committed to the decision. They have a sense of ownership and responsibility for follow-through and the outcome.

Advantages: Individual group members feel valued and respected while agreeing with and supporting the group's decision. Every group member has a stake in the success of the decision.

Disadvantages: Reaching consensus can be a slow process. It requires a structured discussion process that allows enough time to fully explore information, thoughts, and feelings related to the decision. It requires members to understand the issues and be willing to share their opinions openly.

When to Use This Style: Use consensus decisionmaking when you want high quality input and commitment, with follow-through, from the group. You may consider using a neutral facilitator to lead the discussion and decisionmaking if the topic is complex and the outcome will have a major impact on the group's direction.

Please see the quiz activity associated with this module to further examine these categories or styles of decisionmaking and how they apply to your role as a collaborative leader.

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<https://ECESystemsBuilding.icfwebsites.com>